

Introduction to Seminar Participation TASKS

Academic Speaking - Seminars

Seminars are an important part of academic life and study. Being able to participate, and lead, seminars effectively requires attention and focus. In this document you look at the purpose of seminars, what types of academic seminars you may participate in, and how to make the most of them.

What are seminars?

Task 1 – think about the following questions:

1. What are the differences between lectures, tutorials and seminars?
2. What is the difference between a tutor-led seminar and a student-led seminar?
3. What is expected of students in seminars?
4. What communication skills do you think students will need to participate effectively in seminars?
5. Why are seminars such an important part of your study?

Task 2 – Have you ever participated in a group discussion in English?

If you **have** – ask yourself the following:

- What was the topic of the discussion?
- What was the reason for having the discussion?
- How was the discussion organised? Were there two sides or was it a '*round table*' discussion
- What was difficult or challenging about having a discussion in English?

- What do you imagine being the most challenging aspect of participating in a group discussion?
- What do you think it is possible to achieve in group discussions in seminars?
- Is this kind of activity something you look forward to? Why, or why not?

Task 3

Read the advice for new students below. Then say whether statements a) - h) are true (T), false (F) or probably true (P). Where you are not sure, or there is no information, put a question mark (?). You can share your ideas with your ASK Tutor.

Advice for new students

To get the most from seminars and tutorials you must prepare well. For instance you could be expected to:

- do some reading beforehand;
- give your opinions on the recommended reading;
- present a written paper;
- present a paper orally from notes;
- send out a written version of your paper beforehand to everyone who will attend;
- lead a discussion on what the speaker has said;
- take part in a discussion with other students and the lecturer;
- summarise what has been said orally, or in writing;
- hand in a written paper about a week after the seminar or tutorial.

Remember, tutorials and seminars are for your benefit! Use summaries and notes to help you remember information. The more actively you prepare and participate, the more you will learn!

a) Tutors organise seminars/tutorials in advance and provide clear guidelines about what is expected of you.

- b) It is better to attend a tutorial than miss it, even if you have not prepared.
- c) You are all expected to contribute equally.
- d) Lack of preparation means that you probably will not learn anything in seminars/tutorials.
- e) You should memorise what you are going to say before the seminar/tutorial.
- f) You could prepare a seminar with other students, sharing the work.
- g) At some point you will need to do some writing.
- h) It is not necessary to do anything after a seminar.

An important part of discussion is asking questions. Keep your questions focused and short. Questions can be misunderstood if they are vague or too long. Confusion can also occur when it is not clear what you are asking. You need to make clear:

- 1. that it is a question *I have a question*
- 2. what the topic is *... about assessment:*
- 3. what the point is *what is the balance between examinations and course work?*

Useful language

Introducing a question

I've got a question about ...

Could I ask a question ...?

Sorry, could I just ask ...?



.Clarification

Sorry, I didn't follow what you said about ...?

What did you mean when you said ...?

Could you give me an example of ...?

More information

I was interested in what you were saying about ...

Could you tell us more about ...?

Could you expand a bit on what you were saying about ...?

Checking comprehension

So you mean ...?

So you're saying ...?

Can I check I've understood – did you say ...?

Have I got this right ...?

Responding to answers

A final aspect of questioning is how you respond to the answer you are given. It is important to let the person answering your question know whether their answer is satisfactory; for one thing, they need to know if they have said enough! If they have, it may be enough simply to nod, or you could say one of the following:

Yes, I see.

OK, thanks.

Thanks, that's clear now.

However, you may want to indicate that you are not satisfied with the answer.

That's not really what I was asking. What I meant was ...

OK, but what I really wanted to know was ...

Sorry, I'm still not clear about ...

Perhaps I didn't make my question clear. What I was really asking was ...

Task 4 Look at the categories below. What can you think of to say in these situations in a seminar in your programme?

1. Asking a question
2. Asking for repetition when you have not heard what has been said
3. Asking for clarification when you have not completely understood the message
4. Asking someone to be more specific
5. Disagreeing with what has been said
6. Adding something to what has just been said
7. Agreeing with what has been said
8. Summarising what has been said
9. Interrupting when someone is speaking

Now look at these expressions and put them in the correct category above. Share your answers with your ASK Tutor.

- a) *I'd just like to add ...*
- b) *If I might interrupt for a moment ...*
- c) *X put it very well when he / she said ...*
- d) *Could you please explain what you meant when you said that ... ?*
- e) *On balance ...*
- f) *I didn't quite catch that.*
- g) *Excuse me ...*
- h) *I'm afraid I didn't follow your point about ... Could you go over that again?*
- i) *You mentioned X.*
- j) *I see what you mean, but ...*
- k) *Could you go over what you said about ...*
- l) *Overall ...*
- m) *I have a question about X.*
- n) *To sum up ...*
- o) *Could you repeat that, please?*
- p) *I would like to ask something about X.*
- q) *You have a point there, but ...*
- r) *I'm afraid I don't agree that ...*
- s) *X raised some important points.*
- t) *Certainly, it's true that ..., but on the other hand ...*
- u) *I fully agree with X.*
- v) *Can I check that I've understood ... ?*

Task 5

Look at the following situations from seminars or tutorials. Think of at least two things you could say. Use the expressions from Task 1, or any others that you think are appropriate, to help you.

- a) You are distracted because you have just remembered something important you have forgotten to do. You realise that people are looking at you, but you have no idea of what has just been said. What could you say?
- b) You are trying hard to follow a complicated argument from a fellow student, but he/she is using technical terminology you have never heard of before. What could you say?
- c) You have followed the speaker's argument, but you need to know the answer to a question before he/she goes any further and you become lost, worrying about your query. What could you say?
- d) You completely disagree with the opinions of a speaker. How could you challenge him/her appropriately?
- e) You agree with what a speaker has just said, but you have something important that you wish to say.
- f) You feel that you have something really important to add to the discussion. How could you interrupt appropriately to make your point?
- g) You have been asked to give a summary of what has been discussed. How could you do this?
- h) You have had a problem understanding some of the ideas in the seminar, and the lecturer asks you a question. What do you say?
- i) You have forgotten to prepare the text before the seminar, and the text is difficult to understand during the session. What could you say in a group discussion?